

Involvement of the Food Industry in Nutrition Policy

Policy Position Statement

Key messages:	Involvement of the private sector in policy deliberations can cause governments to base policy on wealth creation and the financial and employment potential of companies, rather than on the nutrition and public health effects of the goods they produce. The food industry does not have the mandate nor the right to make decisions about what is in the public's interest. Governments have the sole authority to regulate and carry out activities that protect and promote the general welfare, health and safety of the community.
Key policy positions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should lead the development of nutrition policy. Decision-making on nutrition policy needs to occur without the involvement of food industry (regardless of a company's alignment with public health nutrition goals) representatives or evidence funded by the food industry.2. The government's current reliance on voluntary industry action in the areas of front-of-pack labelling, product reformulation and the Healthy Food Partnership have not resulted in sufficient action. Stronger government leadership and mandatory regulation in these areas are likely to result in greater public health benefits than the current approach.3. Consistent with PHAA's Unhealthy Political Influence policy position statement (2021), all governments should establish regulations that increase transparency governing political donations and lobbying from corporate sectors, including the food industry. Furthermore, the food industry should be disallowed from funding/sponsoring steering committees and groups which are developing food and nutrition policy.
Audience:	Federal, State, Territory and local Governments, regulatory bodies, policy makers and program managers
Responsibility:	PHAA Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group
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Note: This position statement should be read in conjunction with the [Involvement of the Food Industry in Nutrition Policy background paper](#), which provides further supporting arguments, evidence and data.

PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. Involvement of the private sector in policy deliberations can cause governments to prioritise wealth creation and the financial and employment potential of companies above public health consideration (e.g. the nutrition and public health effects of the goods companies produce) as part of policy decisions.¹
2. While the food industry may contribute and have responsibilities to society, the role of government is to govern in the public interest.² As a result they have the sole authority to regulate and carry out activities that protect and promote the general welfare, health and safety of the community, and to do what individuals alone cannot.³
3. The food industry does not have the mandate nor the right to make decisions about what is in the public's interest.

PHAA notes the following evidence:

4. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that food industry involvement in policy development and monitoring may lead to conflicts of interest. In particular, conflicts between private interests (e.g. sales growth, profit) and public health goals, may hinder effective, evidence-based nutrition policy action.⁴
5. Food industry involvement in the development of nutrition policy through provision of conflicted scientific evidence and input has the potential to undermine the integrity of the public health agency or organisation involved. This will decrease public trust and confidence in the agency.⁵
6. Conflicts of interest may occur at a personal or an institutional level. Where improving the health of the population is the primary interest, a personal conflict of interest arises in circumstances where there is potential for a secondary interest to unduly influence, or be perceived to unduly influence, the independence or objectivity of professional judgement or actions regarding a primary interest.⁴
7. Institutional conflict of interest describes a situation where a government's primary interest, as reflected in its institutional mandate to protect and promote public health, may be unduly influenced by the conflicting interest of a non-state actor. For example, an outdoor media company which accepts advertising money from ultra-processed food companies may offer free advertising for government health promotion messages. This may occur in a way that affects, or may reasonably be perceived to affect, the independence and objectivity of the government's work in the area of public health nutrition.⁴

8. Conflicts of interest are more likely to happen when the core business of the external actor is related to goods that contribute to or enable unhealthy diets (i.e. non-aligned with public health nutrition goals).⁴
9. Implementing this policy would contribute towards achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals 3: Good Health and Wellbeing.

PHAA seeks the following actions:

10. Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should lead the development of nutrition policy, unencumbered by the food industry. Decision-making on nutrition policy needs to occur without the involvement of the food industry (regardless of a company's alignment with public health nutrition goals) and using scientific evidence that has not been funded by the food industry.
11. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should be encouraged to use the same world-leading conflict of interest principles as adopted for the Australian Dietary Guidelines review.⁶ Further guidance can be found within the WHO technical guidance on managing conflicts of interest in nutrition policy decision-making and programme implementation.⁴
12. The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments should reform the existing public private partnership approach to nutrition policy in Australia, particularly for the HSR and Healthy Food Partnership which rely heavily on voluntary industry action that has been repeatedly shown to be insufficient.
13. As per international guidance⁴, the food industry should be consulted regarding the implementation of any new nutrition policy initiatives that relate directly to the food industry. However, this process of consultation should be clear and transparent.
14. The monitoring and evaluation of nutrition policy should not involve any organisations that have a commercial interest in the outcome of the evaluation as this is a conflict of interest that cannot be managed and must be eliminated.⁷
15. Consistent with PHAA's [Unhealthy Political Influence policy position statement](#) (2021), donations from the food and beverage industries responsible for products featuring added sugar, sodium, and saturated and trans fats to political parties should be prohibited. Donations from all other food and beverages sectors should be transparently disclosed. Furthermore, food industry should be disallowed from funding/sponsoring steering committees and groups which are developing food and nutrition policy.

PHAA resolves to:

16. Advocate for the above steps to be taken based on the principles in this position statement.

(First adopted 2018, revised 2021 and 2023)

References

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4. World Health Organization. Safeguarding against possible conflicts of interest in nutrition programmes. Draft approach for the prevention and management of conflicts of interest in the policy development and implementation of nutrition programmes at country level. Report by the Director-General. Executive Board 142 session. EB 142/23. http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB142/B142_23-en.pdf?ua=1: WHO; 2017.
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